



16 August 2021

## **STATEMENT FROM THE BORDER EASEMENT TASKFORCE (BET) REGARDING NEW COVID-19 TRAVEL CRITERIA**

Precautionary measures, aimed at ensuring the Cook Islands retains its COVID-19 free status, have been announced by the Cook Islands Government. The new measures were considered by Cabinet last Tuesday and are in response to the new COVID-19 Variants of Concern, such as Delta.

### **The changes**

From 10<sup>th</sup> August, international travel on official business beyond New Zealand has been restricted for all Cook Islands government employees until further notice.

Separately, all Cook Islanders, permanent residents and permit holders in the Cook Islands, have been reminded that non-essential international travel beyond New Zealand is not recommended until further notice.

Chairperson of Border Easement Taskforce Tapaeru Herrmann adds that “any future outbreaks in New Zealand, with whom the Cook Islands has a quarantine-free, two-way travel bubble, will be assumed to be a Variant of Concern such as Delta, resulting in stronger and swifter decision-making, until proven otherwise via epidemiological determination of variance”.

### **Changes potentially affecting New Zealand visitors**

Effective 13 August 11:59pm, anyone who Te Marae Ora Cook Islands Ministry of Health has designated as a ‘Person of Interest’ will not be allowed to enter the Cook Islands.

A Person of Interest is defined as someone who is a COVID-19 exposure risk, as determined by the Cook Islands Ministry of Health.

This includes being a confirmed or probable case; someone waiting for COVID-19 test results; a close or casual contact with a known case/location of interest within the preceding 14 days and a person who has been in a Location of Interest in 14 days prior to travel. A Person of Interest is also anyone designated a risk due to other epidemiological, exposure or clinical reasons (such as clinical indications for COVID19).

Vetting for compliance is through the Ministry of Health’s ‘Online Contact Information’ form required to be submitted 72 hours prior to travel, as is already a requirement for entry under the current Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration Travel Advisory, in addition to completion of the ‘Arrival Health Declaration Form’ upon entering the Cook Islands. The Cook Islands immigration entry criteria still continue to apply.

## Keeping the Cook Islands safe

Recent experiences in Fiji, Australia and New Zealand have shown that the new COVID-19 variants require faster and stronger action than before.

“The health and wellbeing of our people and our visitors has been the Government’s top priority since the beginning of the pandemic” reinforces Herrmann. “Through our ‘zero-tolerance’ policy and continued vigilance at the border, we are very fortunate to have remained COVID-19 free so far”.

Adds Herrmann “Our ongoing approach continues to be based on prevention and preparedness. Key efforts across government and by all Cook Islanders have been centred on fortifying our borders (air and sea ports); in addition to the strengthening of response measures to safely manage and reduce the burden on the nation’s health system, economy and society (should COVID-19 arrive in the Cook Islands)”.

This announcement reflects our cautious approach, and our top priority of keeping all our people and our visitors safe and well.

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